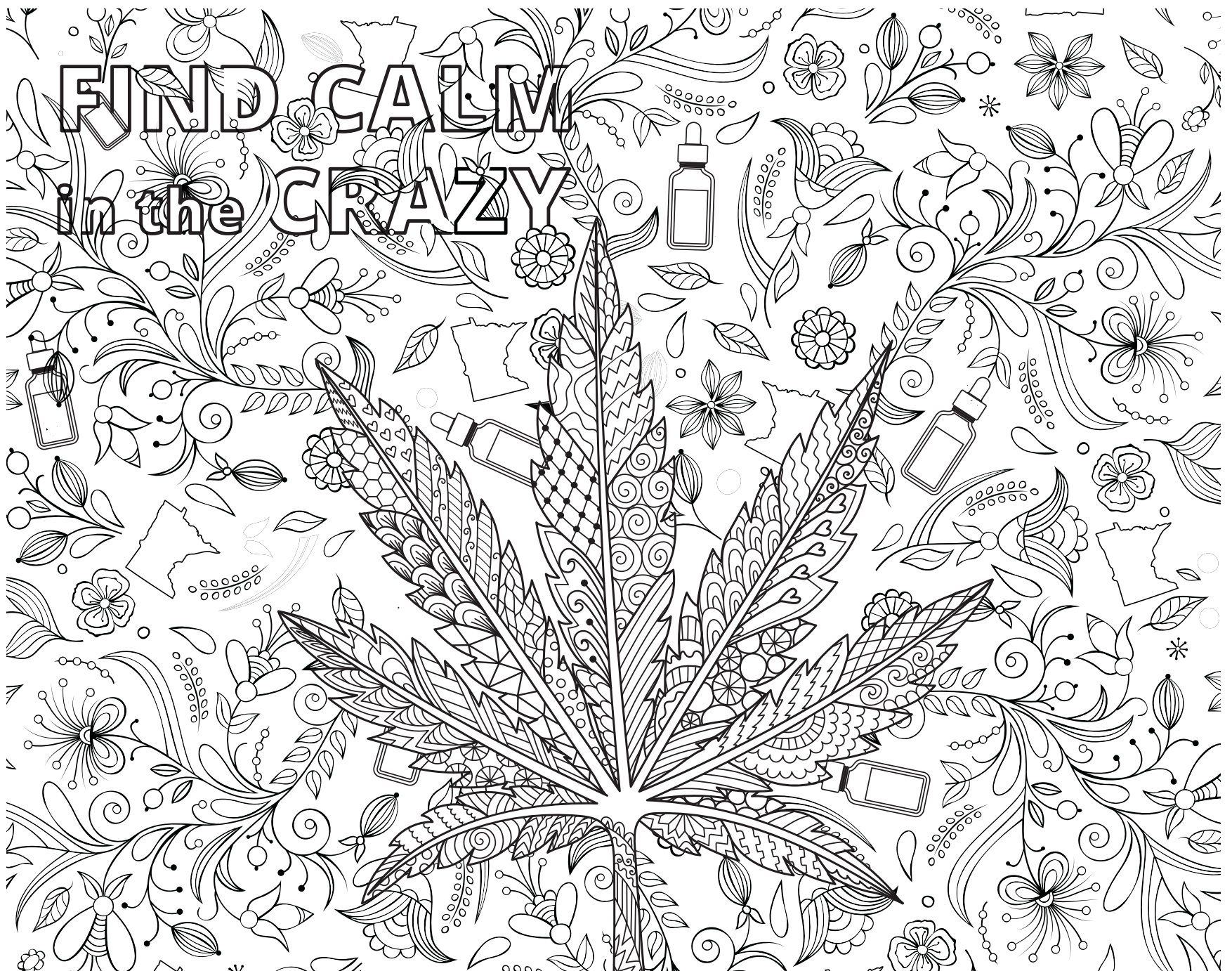


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TOP SECRET

The origins of Top the Tater are a mystery.
Can anyone get to the bottom of it?



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THE SHORTLIST

Caribou Coffee
workers protest
company's corona-
virus response
at citypages.com



AP

THE STAT SHEET

60%

Job losses over the past two months
that have been experienced
by women

173

Social distancing complaints filed
in Minneapolis so far—about 11 a day

\$38 million

Estimated budget shortfall in Duluth due
to COVID-19, up \$13 million from what
officials said last week

301

Minnesota's coronavirus death
total as of Tuesday

**“He’s going to have a tough time in the
primaries against Dwayne Elizondo Mountain
Dew Herbert Camacho, but I look forward to
the debates in the squared circle.”**

Reader Eric Strand responds to “As if
2020 wasn’t enough, Jesse Ventura
might run for president” at citypages.com

STAY OR GO

MAY THE FOURTH be with you? As it stands
now, Gov. Tim Walz’s COVID-19 stay-at-home
order lasts through May 4. (And if you too
find that days have lost all meaning right
now, that’s this Monday.) It’s coming up fast!
Which means Walz has a tough decision to
make before the week is out: Extend it, or
open everything back up? The Star Tribune
reports that the state’s per capita rate of
COVID-19 infection is one of the lowest in
the country, but patients in 7.5 percent of
lab-confirmed cases have died—one of the
worst rates in the nation.

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NURSES** for wearing...
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PENPED UP

Minnesota's biggest jail tries to ward off COVID-19

It was "inevitable," Sheriff Dave Hutchinson said in a statement last week, that some inmates in Hennepin County jail would test positive for coronavirus.

Like people stuck on cruise ships or in nursing homes, the incarcerated are especially vulnerable to the spread of disease. Since the end of March, as Minnesota's state prisons were seeing their first confirmed cases, correctional facilities have been on high alert. Visitation had already been cut off weeks beforehand.

"We serve a population that is larger than the combined population of the next three largest counties," Hutchinson said of Hennepin's inmate count. "We made it a priority to work with our medical experts to identify a plan to prevent the spread of the virus in our jail."

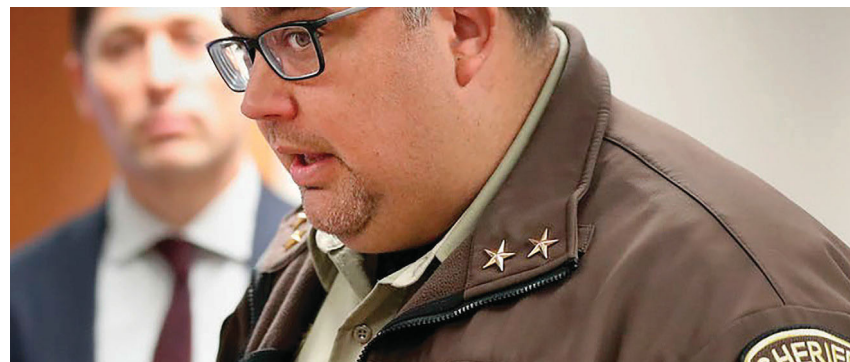
Everybody gets screened when they enter the facility, and those exhibiting symptoms of the virus are tested. By last Thursday afternoon, the jail reported its

first five inmates—and first staff member—to test positive for COVID-19. Medical Director Dr. Rachel Silva says these were likely due to the spread of the virus out in the community, not within the jail.

That could always change. Besides those cases, 117 people have been tested, three results are still pending, another 12 people have been "exposed" to the virus, and 49 more have experienced symptoms of some kind. A spokesperson with the jail says those could mean anything down to a "stomachache."

The next day, a sixth person tested positive, and the jail reported 47 people were "medically isolated" due to "observed or self-reported symptoms." Twenty-two were in quarantine, meaning they'd been in contact with a person who'd tested positive. A total of 123 people had been tested, with 117 of them determined to be coronavirus-free. Another seven were pending results.

The six people who have tested positive



DAVID JOLDS, STAR TRIBUNE

so far are no longer in custody, but that has nothing to do with their health, the spokesperson says. Those decisions are made "irrespective of whether they've tested positive. If the court releases them, they are released."

As a precautionary move, last month, the jail began releasing people accused of "less serious crimes" on bail in order to keep numbers down and lower the risk of disease. The population is now about 45 percent lower than it was at the beginning of March.

Those who test positive and have to remain in jail will be held in "isolation areas" designed to reduce the spread of

the virus. If things worsen to the point that they need hospitalization, staff will move them and continue to guard them there.

Meanwhile, at the prison level, some 212 patients have been tested for COVID-19, 66 of them with positive results. All of those cases come from two outbreaks—one in Willow Lake, where 40 inmates tested positive, and another at Moose Lake, with 26 confirmed cases.

Another 38 inmates are "presumed" positive, and 30 inmates at Moose Lake are "no longer requiring isolation," meaning they've either fully recovered or are no longer considered a threat to spread the virus. —HANNAH JONES

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TOP SECRET



The origins of Top the Tater are a mystery. Can anyone get to the bottom of it?

BY EMILY CASSEL

Earlier this year, the City Pages team decided it would be a “good” and “fun” idea to taste-test the newish flavors of Top the Tater, ranking them alongside the onion-and-chive original.

Because assigning somewhat arbitrary values to snack foods is what we do best, we also figured researching the story would require very little work.

Visit Cub. Obtain and eat dips. Visit Top the Tater’s website. Obtain and synthesize information about how and when these dips were created.

But a trip to top the tater dot com in search of history led us to a landing page about the “legend” of the Midwest snacking staple. “The story of Top the Tater is a complicated one to tell,” it reads. “Hundreds, if not thousands, of lost manuscripts (mostly leather-bound) were probably penned on its history, all with conflicting accounts of how and why it came to be.”

Ha, okay, sure. Funny stuff from the folks in marketing. But seriously: Where did Top the Tater come from?

Reaching out to get the real scoop resulted only in more mystery. “The legend might not be 100 percent accurate, but you’d be surprised how much Top the Tater history has been lost to time,” brand manager Josh Brock said. “Our head of marketing



at Kemps has been at the company for over 30 years, and according to her it's just always been."

That... didn't sound possible? But quickly fact-checking his claim—Googling various combinations of "Top the Tater history" and "Top the Tater inventor"—didn't turn up any helpful information either, and mostly made us hungry.

"Unfortunately, archives from that time are non-existent," Brock said. "All that to say, we could use all the investigative journalism help we can get."

[Wipes chip crumbs from shirt]

Josh...

[Snaps suspenders]

Don't mind if we do.

Brands throw around words like "iconic" and "cult favorite" a lot, and Top the Tater is no different. It's the job of a *serious investigative journalist* to take those claims with a healthy heaping of salt. And perhaps a fistful of chives.

But if you live in Minnesota, you know it to be true: Top the Tater is a requisite. It's delicious and ubiquitous, a staple at cookouts and graduation parties and trips to the cabin (and often anniversaries and bridal showers and Thanksgiving dinners).

"Ask any Minnesotan about dips, and the first words you'll hear will likely be 'Kemps Top the Tater,'" the Food Network wrote in their guide to the best dip in every state. Tasting Table has also recognized Top the Tater—"sour cream freckled with chives and onions (and a little MSG)"—as the state's official condiment. (A milk-based dip with nary a pepper to be found? What could be more Minnesotan?)

You can get images of the beloved little tubs on everything from a fanny pack to a phone case—and people do, though they're not content to leave it at that. Have you ever considered, for example, that with a few strategically punched holes and a length of twine, you can turn a Top tub into a purse? One woman did, posting the photos on TTT's Facebook to prove it.

Then there's truly next-level fan behavior like that of Darys Bauman from Delano, Minnesota, who made dehydrated Top the Tater for a fridge-less canoeing trip in the Boundary Waters. (He tells us it's not hard to prep your own portage-friendly snack: "Simply spread the awesomeness thinly on dehydrator trays outfitted with fruit leather sheets, turn the dehydrator on, and dehydrate until it's completely dry.") Or Anna Johnson, who packed a tub of Top the Tater and a bag of Old



KRISTA PASCOE PHOTOGRAPHY

Dutch Ripple Chips to use as props for her engagement photos.

"I've always grown up with Top the Tater in the house. Always," she says. "I introduced my fiancé to it, and I introduced his friends to it, too.... There's only two of us in the house, but we always get the family size."

Now, the dip is good. This we know. One City Pages writer has publicly proclaimed, "I'm a bottom for Top the Tater"; another believes, given enough time and test kitchen access, it could reasonably be turned into a serviceable savory ice cream.

As for *why* it's so good?

To start, TTT is made with real sour cream—lots of dips out there are oil-based. "It's full-leaded, if you will," says Rachel Kylo, senior vice president of growth and innovation at Kemps. It gets its onion-y, chive-y kick from the same proprietary blend of spices they've used since day one, a recipe guarded almost as closely as the Coca-Cola formula.

"It's such a funny little product," she says. "It's highly addictive, and it's just got this little personality."

That personality is part of its popularity, too. Take the tub itself: an almost offensive shade of green, a logo that looks straight out of the '70s, the carton taller than it is wide—like no other dip on the market—ensuring you get goo all over your knuckles as you scrape chips past the half-full point. Something about it feels homey and genuine—there's an unassuming comfort, like you're pulling it from your grandmother's fridge every time.

"We know: Don't mess with something that's not broken," says Kyle Punton, "director of dipping" for TTT. "The original green Top the Tater tub with the goofy shape... it makes no sense, but people love it. We're not changing it." They haven't even put the Kemps logo on there, so great is the concern about messing with success.

"The brand doesn't try too hard, right?" Punton says. "It's got the ugly green pack-

After introducing Top the Tater to her fiancé, Tanner, Anna Johnson brought a tub to their engagement shoot.

aging, it hasn't really been updated in god knows how long. It just feels Midwestern to its roots."

If you're accustomed to seeing Top the Tater next to sour cream in the dairy aisle, you might not know you're one of a lucky group of dip-pers: TTT is pretty much only sold in the Upper Midwest.

"I would bet that a lot of people, even the crazy tater-heads, don't know that it's made in Minnesota," Punton says. There's nothing that *screams* Minnesota about it, "But it is a Minnesota brand."

Kylo says that while they haven't been able to determine when exactly it was launched, they do know it was created by a Minnesota-based dairy cooperative (essentially, a bunch of farmers who came together as a group) called Mid-America Dairy Farms. The cooperative marketed a bunch of dairy products under that name in the early 1970s, and in the '80s, Kemps came to own Top the Tater when they purchased the Farmington factory where it was being made.

Busy with its existing and extensive line of dairy products, the new owner paid almost no attention to those tater tubs at first.

"Top the Tater was just this little product in a green package that chugged along, grew a little bit every year, and quite frankly was kind of a distant cousin," Kylo says.

But sales kept quietly growing. When Kemps did take notice and dug into the data, they found a few Minnesota cities—the Duluth area in particular—where sales were almost confusingly, disproportionately high. They were baffled.

It's also somehow entirely trend-proof. Consider the name; Top the Tater was cre-

ated to *top potatoes*. Only in the last 10 or 15 years has it been considered more of a dip. (“I mean, who eats baked potatoes on a regular basis anymore?” Punton laughs.)

TTT sales stayed strong through the anti-fat diet crusades of the late ’90s and early 2000s, and they haven’t faltered now, even as more and more Americans go vegan or dairy-free. Kylo says there’s just never been a significant dip (!) in sales. In fact, with snack consumption way up thanks to a certain stay-at-home order and the munching time inherent therein? “Top the Tater sales have skyrocketed since about St. Patrick’s Day,” Punton says. “The last month has been absolutely bananas.”

Here in Minnesota, at least. Punton says as you get farther and farther from the Tater’s point of origin, it sells less and less. People don’t know it, and they’re less likely to try it. (Case in point: Anna Johnson’s fiancé, Tanner, is from western Wisconsin, but he and his family had never heard of it.)

Only recently have sales in Wisconsin and the Dakotas picked up, and though they continue expanding—moving closer to Chicago and down into Iowa, largely thanks to a partnership with Hy-Vee—popularity still isn’t booming elsewhere. It’s part of the reason those new flavors come in a shorter, squatter, less 1970s-looking tub: The idea is to let folks know, visually, “You’re supposed to dip stuff in me!”

Meanwhile, Midwest expats clamor for it. People fly with it smuggled in their luggage or cross state lines with 10 tubs crammed into a cooler. They’ll flood Top the Tater’s Facebook with requests to bring the dip to their city/state/country, the dip equivalent of “Come to Brazil!” But while it was briefly available for nationwide delivery thanks to Local Crate, and made appearances in Aldi stores around the country during the 2018 Super Bowl, for now it’s most widely available in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas.

“We wish all these people who have had Top the Tater and love it would get jobs at grocery chains as dairy buyers,” Punton chuckles. “You go to some of these places, and when it’s not in their area, it’s never been something they’ve known, it’s hard to get distribution.”

Until that happens, as the bright-green brand often tells troubled folks who’ve traveled away from Minnesota: Want TTT? Better move to the Midwest.

So there’s your “where,” and a pretty good explanation of your “how” and “why.” But... who? When?

We decided to go to the top: the National Milk Producers Federation. They pointed us to Dairy Farmers of America, which Mid-America Farms would eventually become part of. The DFA folks said they believe Top the Tater was developed and launched by Mid-America

Farms in the 1970s, before the collective joined their ranks.

“Unfortunately,” spokesperson Kim O’Brien said, “the early history of Top the Tater has been lost through the years.”

As we’ve already covered, the Kemps camp doesn’t know its origins either. Brock said that they recently spoke with an octogenarian retired executive who was with the Mid-America Dairy company in the 1970s and said TTT has been a Minnesota staple since at least the mid-1950s. But the trail ended there.

Your pals at City Pages were really scraping the bottom of the tub here, source-wise. But we lobbed one last dairy hail mary: an email to the Minnesota Historical Society.

That message eventually landed in the inbox of MNHS reference librarian Christopher True, who decided the best course of action would be to track down old trade publications.

Not long after, we got an encouraging follow-up: “After some digging, I found a mention in the April 1962 Monthly News of the Twin City Milk Producers Association,” True reported, attaching a few photos of the issue to prove it. “It would appear that Top the Tater (under the Recipe Book brand) was released to the market in March of 1962!”

There it is.

Top the Tater hasn’t “always been,” but it’s certainly been around. Now 58 years old, TTT was created the same year the first American astronaut orbited the earth, when the average home cost \$12,500. Bob Dylan’s self-titled debut album had just hit shelves. JFK was alive and kicking.

“As far as more details as to the ‘history’ of Top the Tater, it would appear that (according to some stories in later issues of the aforementioned Monthly News) there was an uptick in sour cream sales, and the TC Milk Producers Association was keen to cash in on the trend,” True wrote. “Later volumes, particularly the ones in the early ’70s, mention the first ‘new’ flavor of Top (bacon!), and there are some mentions about sour cream’s ascendance in popularity.”

It’s still unclear who the mastermind behind TTT’s secret spice blend is, and while we really wanted to take a look at those trade publications in person, True’s reply came before COVID-19 shut down the Minnesota Historical Society’s reference library. Right now, neither he nor we can get back in for more info.

(If you’re like, “It was my grandfather! Grandpa Joe invented it!” please email us, so that we might update our story—and thank the man.)

Otherwise, for now, it looks like the TTT “legend” landing page was telling the truth after all. “While archeologists, biologists, sociologists, and meteorologists will continue to debate theories until the end of time, the truth is that Top the Tater’s origin has been lost to the ages.”

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BY SARAH BRUMBLE

Now is not an ideal time to be critical of others' efforts—unless we're talking about elected leaders encouraging us to mainline bleach and shove mythical curative lightbulbs up our asses.

As a non-baker, cook of middling efficacy, and student of ninth-grade-level thermodynamics, your author is overjoyed and grateful for the culinary skills of others, full stop. Plus, if her granma instilled in her anything it is these two major refrains: 1) "Wantin' and gettin' are two different things," and b) "Make do."

Nonetheless, a reader was willing to point at the elephant in the room on behalf of all:

"Now that I'm eating a lot more take-out, I'm finding just how much does not travel well," they wrote recently, before submitting an earnest petition.

(A shining counterpoint to poor-traveling foods has been discovering the joy of a roadie jucy lucy from Matt's Bar. Fetching a grease-splattered bag that contains fries and a seared meat blimp is an ideal hack to the Marshmallow Test for those of us who otherwise scald ourselves every single time, warnings be damned, when dining in the Obama booth.)

Again, the reader in question hadn't come to gripe, but with a request we're happy to fulfill. "It would be great to see a list of local restaurants that offer pre-packaged 'meals for later,'" they continued, suggesting those meals hit a "sweet spot between not wanting to cook and not wanting soggy takeout tacos."

What appears below is a smattering of efforts by institutions around the Twin Cities—from restaurants and delis offering assemble-at-home meals, to take-and-bake and frozen options from local purveyors—all of whom hope to feed you and yours.

As it turns out, sometimes wanting is getting!

Jon Wipfli's **Animales BBQ** has returned with a new to-go-only menu designed to feed two to four people at a time. Each weekend's variety will change; last Friday through Sunday, they had a whole, smoked Peterson Beef Plate rib rack on the docket, including house red sauce and pickles, which was chilled and vacuum sealed to reheat whenever is convenient. *Animales BBQ, 1121 Quincy St. NE, Minneapolis; animalesbarbeque.com*

GOODBYE, SOGGY TAKEOUT

11 restaurants serving take-and-bake meal kits



ERICA STRAIT

Centro at Popol Vuh wants you to have your guac and eat it too, whether straight from the pint or as an accompaniment to any of their "Home Meats"—a section unto itself from their Take and Bake menu, which ranges from nachos to queso fundido and tortilla soup. Not a soggy taco in sight here, fam. *Centro at Popol Vuh, 1414 Quincy St. NE, Minneapolis; popolvuhmpls.com*

St. Paul's **Colossal Cafe** has options like family-sized corned beef hash kits and pot pies that each serve two to three, alongside racks of ribs, hot sauces, bottles of cava, and more, available for pre-ordered pickup Thursday and Saturday via their website. *Colossal Cafe, two St. Paul locations; colossalcafe.com*

Look, we know it's almost cheating to include a takeaway frozen pizza in this list, but hear us out? **Football Pizza** from Crescent Moon Bakery in Northeast makes pies bigger than most you'd find in a grocery

store, with flavor options like "gyro," and they're a family-owned pizza business with a heart the size of Texas. Grab six from their freezer and stock yours like a true Minneapolis local. *Football Pizza, 2339 Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis; footballpizza.com*

Foxy Falafel's meal kits come in a variety of options, from vegetarian falafel and chicken shawarma to all-out carnivorous lamb meatballs. Each flavor begs to be matched with Foxy's array of ready-made desserts ripe for snagging—no assembly required. *Foxy Falafel, 791 Raymond Ave., St. Paul, foxyfalafel.square.site*

Grand Cafe changed up its game to offer 30 "Meal & Wellness Kits" weekly. Each focuses on quality of life. Included in that broad mission are "treats for your home and your mind" like buckets of flowers to be arranged, watercolor starters, a cocktail kit, and (for our purposes) meals to be

assembled at home like jambalaya and coq au vin... with instructions, of course. They go quickly, so far be it from us to instruct you to stalk their joyous social accounts? *Grand Cafe, 3804 Grand Ave. S., Minneapolis; grandcafemn.com*

Consistently spectacular **Hazel's Northeast** has created a clutch of packages that require a simple warm-up for dinner, or can be squirreled away for later in the week when morale and oomph run low(er). On the menu are Chicken Wild Rice Gumbo, Swedish Meatballs for Two, and a shareable pot pie (in addition to regular takeout items). *Hazel's Northeast, 2859 Johnson St. NE, Minneapolis; hazelsnetgo.com*

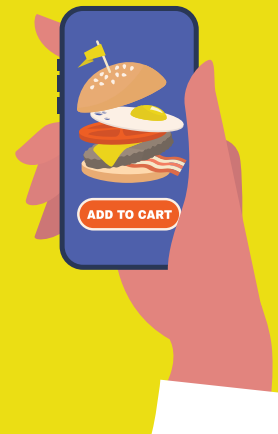
South Minneapolis lazarus queen **Heather's** offers a heat-at-home quarter roasted chicken (your choice of light or dark meat) for \$12. Because, let's be real, they know you're not going to roast a chicken correctly anytime soon. (Unless you start watching some videos?) *Heather's, 5201 Chicago Ave., Minneapolis; heathersmpls.com*

ie Italian Eatery designed their "Whole Kit and Ka-Noodle" to bring together the whole family for a meal. The take-and-bake package (starting at \$69) feeds four to five (plus "bambino") with pasta, "bambino pizza pouch," soup, salad, and a hard-to-skip option to add desserts like gelatos and tiramisu. *ie Italian Eatery, 4724 Cedar Ave. S., Minneapolis; italianeatery.com*

Wednesday through Sunday, **Red Wagon Pizza Company** slings DIY pizza kits and par-baked 'zas straight from their south Minneapolis kitchen. Pre-order whichever level of hands-on-ness fits best with your current lifestyle. They've got an app or online ordering portal (though the app is preferable and most sustainable for the business), and zero-contact retrieval. *Red Wagon Pizza Company, 5416 Penn Ave. S., Minneapolis; redwagon-mpls.com*

Even on an average day, **Sikora's Polish Market** offers a larger selection of frozen pierogi than most folks have ever dreamt of, plus smoked sausages, and homemade cabbage rolls. Now Sikora's is selling those same cabbage rolls in 1.75-pound portions to-go, plus frozen pierogi online... with delivery of both available all over town. For some of us, this was a heavenly assemble-at-home meal discovery... *Sikora's Polish Market, 1625 Washington St. NE, Minneapolis; sikorapolishmarket.com* 📍

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IN AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE, we're celebrating May Day this weekend. But here, in the darkest timeline, we're arguing about whether or not to reopen tattoo shops and digging up details of the time that Joe Exotic bought wolves from Minnesota.



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WOLF KING?

Joe Exotic purchased animals from MN's Fur-Ever Wild

BY JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

In 2018, self-proclaimed “Tiger King” Joe Maldonado-Passage wanted to expand his animal empire. So he purchased 28 gray wolves from Fur-Ever Wild.

Run by Terri Petter, Fur-Ever Wild was a petting zoo/slaughterhouse located in Eureka Township, near outer-ring suburbs like Lakeville and Farmington. People would pay for access to cute, docile wolf pups, coyotes, and other wild animals. But once those animals reached a certain age, they would be killed for their fur.

In 2017, a federal lawsuit was filed against Fur-Ever Wild and Petter by the Lockwood Animal Rescue Center and the Animal Legal Defense Fund citing violations of the Endangered Species Act. But just as Lockwood was set to seize the animals from the property, they disappeared without a trace.

That's where Joe Exotic comes in. Christopher Berry, the ALDF attorney behind the Fur-Ever lawsuit, soon received tips that Exotic was posting on his Facebook page about adding wolves to

his ever-growing menagerie. The timing was a little suspicious. “Joe Exotic stating that he had just acquired 28 wolves coincided with Fur-Ever Wild's [wolf disappearance],” says Berry.

His dreams of becoming a “Wolf King” didn't go as planned, however, as Exotic quickly discovered that he didn't have the training, knowledge, or facilities to care for the creatures. Tipsters next alerted ALDF that Exotic was trying to sell at least four pups on social media (imagine discovering that post on Facebook Marketplace).

Berry sent Exotic a legal letter warning him that he had violated the Endangered Species Act when he brought the wolves across state lines, and that selling protected animals on social media was illegal.

“[Exotic responded with a] profanity-laden tirade, one in which he ultimately concluded that the wolves were a pain to deal with,” says Berry. “They were running amok in the facility and digging their way out of the enclosures... so he offered to let Lockwood Animal Rescue Center take them off him.”


Lockwood was able to pick up 25 of the 28 animals from his Oklahoma-based zoo, Greater Wynnewood Exotic Animal Park. Of the three missing, Joe stated one had died from infection, and two had disappeared.

The recovery effort was featured in an episode of Animal Planet's *Wolves and Warriors*, a reality show that documents Lockwood's efforts to rehabilitate neglected animals. Exotic makes an appearance, referring to the animals as “bitches” and explaining that he's just a nice guy trying to save some wolves.

“We got a phone call from a lady up in Minnesota,” Exotic tells the camera crew. “She had over 20 wolves, and she needed to get rid of them by that Tuesday. So we ended up with something like 26 wolves—that I didn't need.”

“Private breeding, possession, and exploitation of animals like wolves is wrong,” says Berry. “It causes animals to suffer, and that's what we saw as a result of the wolves going to Joe Exotic's property. Animals shouldn't be bred and exploited for profit.”

As to where the remaining wolves of Fur-Ever Wild's stash ended up? The truth remains a mystery—probably because, as far as we know, Exotic was the only buyer advertising his wolves on social media.

And that was the end of Joe Exotic's dabbling in wolf ownership. Not too long after, Exotic found himself sentenced to 22 years in prison for an attempted hit job and a variety of tiger-related fuckery, all of which is documented on Netflix's mega-hit show *Tiger King*. 



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A-LIST



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CRITICAL INK

Local tattoo artists are leery of the push to reopen shops

BY EMILY CASSEL

Lana Bosak misses tattooing. So. Goddamn. Much.

But Bosak, who most recently worked at Tailorbird Tattoo in Nokomis, thinks that as we're staying socially distant to try and flatten that COVID-19 curve, the safest thing for them and those they tattoo is to keep the guns away for now.

"I'm grateful for my clients and the connections I've formed with them," Bosak says. "I care about them. I'm willing to undergo hard times to keep them safe."

So when a letter started circulating to Twin Cities tattooers last week about what precautions and new protocols could be used to get shops open again—a letter that included a link to the MN Senate Republicans site, where artists could urge lawmakers to let them reopen—Bosak was concerned. They weren't the only one.

"Basically, there were some tattoo artists organizing to contact the Republican party to try to get us reopened," says Emi Nijiya, who owns Standish's Jackalope Tattoo. "They were saying because we have extra capability with understanding bloodborne pathogens and universal precautions, et cetera, that we were more capable of handling the virus."

Now, no disrespect to the tattoo artists

of the Twin Cities, but... folks?

"None of us know how to deal with this virus," Nijiya says. "Even medical providers don't know quite what they're dealing with at this point."

"The training on bloodborne pathogens tattoo artists are required to take is online and takes a few hours," independent tattooer Helen Sevig explains. It teaches artists how to avoid cross-contamination and practice universal precautions, but Sevig says it's not nearly comprehensive enough for, you know, a global respiratory pandemic.

The letter echoed the language in a recent Move On petition: Tattoo artists already take sanitation seriously, they could wear masks and gloves upon reopening, and they'd be working one-on-one with clients.

But tattooers see big problems with reopening right now. One of the CDC's major bullet points in stopping the spread of COVID-19 is keeping at least six feet of distance between yourself and others. "Which, unless you're a Wacky Wavy Inflatable Tube Arm Man, I don't know how that works to tattoo someone," says Amo Azure, another of Jackalope's artists.

Nijiya notes that those pushing for places to open up again would need



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personal protective equipment—especially masks and gloves, which are in short supply even for those in the medical field. “Why should we, a community that isn’t [made up of] essential workers, have access to that?”

“Other places in the nation have put moratoriums on elective surgeries to reserve desperately needed medical supplies,” adds Azure. “And I’m supposed to in good conscience take those supplies?”

It’s become a source of conflict in the tattooing community; Nijiya actually left social media because of the fights that were breaking out.

“The artists that want to open back up are leaders in our industry, great tattooers, good people,” says Matt Ward (a.k.a. Pookhi) who owns Uptown’s Peregrine Tattoo. “I have immense respect for them.”

“Artists are at each other’s throats because they don’t agree,” Nijiya says. “The last thing we need to be doing right now is separating ourselves from each other... but the amount of pressure the financial restraints are putting on people is making them act in ways they normally wouldn’t. They don’t know what to do, because how else are they going to put food in their mouths?”

The problem is that the majority of tattooers, like many other independent contractors and self-employed workers, haven’t received unemployment. Even those who work for a shop are generally classified as independent contractors, meaning until recently they’ve been ineligible for financial support (and those applications are moving *slooooooowly*—no one’s heard of an artist being approved yet). PPP funds are gone.

Nijiya has personally applied for about five financial support programs since mid-March and not one has come through; Pookhi filed for a PPP loan along with other SBA loans and several grants, and he’s applied for unemployment. Nothing. And if tattoo shops were to reopen, it would remove their access to the few government programs that do exist to support small businesses.

May 4 is coming up, and Nijiya doesn’t think tattoo shops are even close to being able to reopen. Could they keep fewer than 10 people in the shop? Yes. Take temperatures at the door? Sure. But so many Twin Cities tattoo shops are tiny spaces, with no way to keep six feet of distance between clients, and there’s no way of knowing if someone’s asymptomatic. Lots of artists think we’re simply not ready yet.

“I would feel comfortable returning to work when the CDC and medical professionals declare there has been an effective way to manage the spread or curve,” Sevig says. Until we can test widely and with greater accuracy, though: “I will only assume every client I see is a carrier.”

Artists say to stay closed they’ll need help from the government, whether that’s in the form of loans or mortgage and rent breaks, which would be huge.

“If people want to help tattooers, piercers, hairdressers, massage therapists... tell the state to give us actual relief funding and not group us in as ‘gig workers,’” Pookhi says. “This isn’t a gig. We do this work full time. I don’t want to be forced to open up my shop and risk my health and the health of others in the middle of a pandemic just to make ends meet.” **GP**

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RADIO ON

With listeners stuck at home, non-commercial radio plays a bigger role than ever

BY KEITH HARRIS

Turn on the radio and it sounds pretty much like any other old Monday morning in the Twin Cities. DJs are making jokes about weed—it's 4/20, after all—and the music they're playing fits the mood and the theme. But that-thing-we-can't-help-but-talk-about keeps sneaking into the on-air banter, and even when it's not mentioned explicitly there's a subtle shift in the tone of these broadcasts.

At 89.3 the Current, DJ Sean McPherson, sitting in for a vacationing Jill Riley, is back-introducing D'Angelo's "Brown Sugar," explaining why it's an apt choice for this 20th of April. "Thanks for taking a break from the constant barrage of news headlines to listen to some music," he adds.

As Lords of Acid's "Marijuana in Your Brain" crackles to a close, the co-hosts of KFAI's *A.M. Drive* morning show exchange chatter, as morning show hosts are wont to do. Mason Butler plugs a guest's upcoming performance—on Instagram Live because

"We don't go to places anymore," he jokes. Barb Abney starts to announce who'll "be coming in" tomorrow, then catches herself and says they "will be our guest."

You have to listen to Radio K for a while to hear any difference from the college station's usual fare. This morning's playlist includes Pitchfork-approved electronic musician Yves Tumor and Canadian indie-rockers Braids. Then you realize what you haven't heard: live voices. The mix is interrupted only by pre-recorded spots, including a message thanking donors to a recent pledge drive on behalf of the University of Minnesota students "who will one day walk through our halls again."

With more people stuck in their houses, either working from home or laid off, radio has the potential to play a bigger role in public life than it has in years. Despite this, commercial radio struggles to maintain relevance, with conglomerates iHeartMedia and Entercom gutting their workforces in response to the current crisis. That leaves

public and community radio stations in a position to form even stronger bonds with their audiences—even as these stations make the adjustments necessary for broadcasting during a pandemic.

For *A.M. Drive*, that means the co-hosts don't get to be in the same room with each other. Barb Abney is working from home, while Mason Butler is in the KFAI studio, where there are never more than four people at the same time these days.

Abney says her commute has been simplified: "I walk downstairs and I Zoom in. I honestly have more time to prep now. I just have to walk down and open a laptop and I'm ready." She sends Butler a list of songs and they work from there. "It's not very much different than how we did it before," Abney says, though using video conferencing tech took some getting used to. "I've always shied away from cameras in studios, but now I'm staring into one all morning because Mason's putting everything up on Facebook Live."

As a program that depends heavily on interview segments, *A.M. Drive* faces additional challenges. "Not having guests come in was an adjustment," Abney says. And then there's the matter of not centering every discussion on the pandemic or the stay-at-home order. "You talk about it, you get it out of the way. We're trying to get the stories that aren't all about that."

DJs are still headed in to work at the

Current these days, along with other essential personnel. The station has made some adjustments to our new musical landscape—with no live music scheduled, the station's "gig list" has gone virtual, rounding up livestreamed events, including those the Current is sponsoring and putting on itself. But mostly, 89.3 is emphasizing its familiar voices and presence. "We're trying to keep as much continuity as as possible," says the station's managing director, David Safar.


"We probably take it for granted, the fact that we're all hearing the same songs together at the same time," Safar says of the role radio plays in creating community. "But now people can't gather and see live music together, so that shared experience is what we're hearing a reaction to."

Jim McGuinn, the Current's program director, agrees that listeners are seeking out "curation, companionship, a socializing experience. People are feeling freaked out, and a playlist doesn't feel as connective as radio does."

Over at Radio K, they've been broadcasting remotely since March 15, when the student-run station switched over to the overnight mix usually reserved for the 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. slot. The station's CDs are still in Rarig Hall, so for the remote broadcast, music director Maddie Schwappach (who recently wrote about her final show on Radio K for City Pages) has been adding new digital files to the mix. Online, the DJ currently on-air is billed as "Social Distancing."

The process is working so far, says program director Darby Ottoson, and even yields surprising moments of serendipity. "When I tuned in today I heard a song by Guided By Voices called 'Hold on Hope,'" she says. "Even with an automated system, the radio can spit out music that means something."

While keeping the station on air, the Radio K crew faces other challenges as well. They had to navigate a pledge drive, and, with the staff graduating, need to hire replacements. "We have a lot of chaotic energy—but in a good way," Ottoson says. "We're out of trial-and-error mode, and now we know what sticks."

She adds, "It's been a time to reevaluate our purpose in the community. We're all asking how we can offer a comforting presence." And that's a message you hear repeated from everyone in non-commercial radio these days. "We're all looking for something that takes you away from the everyday hell," says Abney. "That's why people keep tuning in." 

FREE WILL ASTROLOGY

>> By Rob Brezsny

♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19): I always hesitate to advise Aries people to slow down, be more deliberate, and pay closer attention to boring details. The Rams to whom I provide such counsel may be rebelliously annoyed with me—so much so that they move even faster, and with less attention to the details. Nevertheless, I'll risk offering you this advisory right now. Here's my reasoning, which I hope will make the prospect more appealing: If you commit to a phase in which you temporarily invoke more prudence, discretion, and watchfulness than usual, it will ultimately reward you with a specific opportunity to make rapid progress.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Is there an area of your life where you would like a do-over? A chance to cancel the past and erase lingering messiness and clear a path for who-knows-what new possibility? The coming weeks will be an excellent time to prepare—not to actually take the leap, but rather make yourself ready for the leap. You will have God and fate and warm fuzzy vibes on your side as you dare to dream and scheme about a fresh start. Any mistakes you committed once upon a time could become irrelevant as you fantasize practically about a future breakthrough.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20): In 1855, Gemini-born Walt Whitman published his book of poetry *Leaves of Grass*. A literary critic named Rufus Wilmot Griswold did not approve. In a review, he derided the work that would eventually be regarded as one of America's literary masterpieces. "It is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived such a mass of stupid filth," Griswold wrote, adding that Whitman had a "degrading, beastly sensuality" driven by "the vilest imaginings." Whitman's crafty Gemini intelligence responded ingeniously to the criticism. In the next edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the author printed Griswold's full review. It helped sell even more books! I invite you to consider comparable twists and tricks.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22): In your efforts to develop a vibrant community and foster a vital network of connections, you have an advantage. Your emotionally rich, nurturing spirit instills trust in people. They're drawn to you because they sense you will treat them with care and sensitivity. On the other hand, these fine attributes of yours may sometimes cause problems. Extra-needy, manipulative folks may interpret your softness as weakness. They might try to exploit your kindness to take advantage of you. So the challenge for you is to be your generous, welcoming self without allowing anyone to violate your boundaries or rip you off. Everything I just said will be helpful to meditate on in the coming weeks, as you reinvent yourself for the future time when the coronavirus crisis will have lost much of its power to disrupt our lives.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Now is an excellent time to take inventory of your integrity. You're likely to get crucial insights if you evaluate the state of your ethics, your authenticity, and your compassion. Is it time to boost your commitment to a noble cause that transcends your narrow self-interest? Are there ways you've been less than fully fair and honest in your dealings with people? Is it possible you have sometimes failed to give your best? I'm not saying that you are guilty of any of those sins. But most of us are indeed guilty of them, at least now and then. And if you are, Leo, now is your special time to check in with yourself—and make any necessary adjustments and corrections.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): I predict that you will have more flying dreams than usual in the coming weeks—as well as more dreams in which you're traveling around the world in the company of rebel angels and dreams in which you're leading revolutionary uprisings of oppressed people against tyrannical overlords and dreams of enjoying eight-course gourmet feasts with sexy geniuses in the year 2022. You may also, even while not asleep, well up with outlandish fantasies and exotic desires. I don't regard any of these likelihoods as problematical. In fact, I applaud them and encourage them. They're healthy for you! Bonus: All the wild action transpiring in your psyche may prompt you to generate good ideas about fun adventures you could embark on once the coronavirus crisis has ebbed.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): It's time to work your way below the surface level of things, Libra: to dig and dive into the lower reaches where the mysteries are darker and richer; to marshal your courage as you go in quest of the rest of the story. Are you willing to suspend some of your assumptions about the way things work so as to become fully alert for hidden agendas and dormant potentials? Here's a piece of advice: Your fine analytical intelligence won't be enough to guide you through this enigmatic terrain. If you hope to get face to face with the core source, you'll have to call on your deeper intuition and non-rational hunches.

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): When was the last time you researched the intricacies of what you don't like and don't desire and don't want to become? Now is a favorable time to take a thorough inventory. You'll generate good fortune for yourself by naming the following truths: 1. goals and dreams that are distractions from your primary mission; 2. attitudes and approaches that aren't suitable for your temperament and that don't contribute to your maximum health; 3. people and influences that are not in alignment with your highest good.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky believed that the cleverest people are those who regularly call themselves fools. In other words, they feel humble amusement as they acknowledge their failings and ignorance—thereby paving the way for creative growth. They steadily renew their commitment to avoid being know-it-alls, celebrating the curiosity that such blessed innocence enables them to nurture. They give themselves permission to ask dumb questions! Now is a favorable time for you to employ these strategies.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): What wonderful improvements and beautiful influences would you love to be basking in by May 1, 2021? What masterpieces would you love to have as key elements of your life by then? I invite you to have fun brainstorming about these possibilities in the next two weeks. If an exciting idea bubbles up into your awareness, formulate a plan that outlines the details you'll need to put in place so as to bring it to fruition when the time is right. I hereby authorize you to describe yourself with these terms: begotter; originator; maker; designer; founder; producer; framer; generator.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): If I asked you to hug and kiss yourself regularly, would you think I was being too cute? If I encouraged you to gaze into a mirror once a day and tell yourself how beautiful and interesting you are, would you say, "That's too woo-woo for me." I hope you will respond more favorably than that, Aquarius. In fact, I will be praying for you to ascend to new heights of self-love between now and May 25. I will be rooting for you to be unabashed as you treat yourself with more compassionate tenderness than you have ever dared to before. And I do mean EVER!

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): In the coming weeks, I'd love to see you get excited about refining and upgrading the ways you communicate. I don't mean to imply that you're a poor communicator now; it's just that you're in a phase when you're especially empowered to enhance the clarity and candor with which you express yourself. You'll have an uncanny knack for knowing the right thing to say at the right moment. You'll generate blessings for yourself as you fine-tune your listening skills. Much of this may have to happen online and over the phone, of course. But you can still accomplish a lot!

freewillastrology@freewillastrology.com

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TAKE THE FIFTH

BY BRENDAN EMMETT QUIGLEY

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15 Despite the fact
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17 Airhead
18 Staff that sells
washing machines?
20 Bit in the feedback
21 Debit card
number, briefly
22 Folksy greeting
23 Turn left during
complete chaos?
28 Stage after larva
29 Ireland
30 It's at the center
of the universe
33 Menial workers
35 Thin nail
36 Uno card
37 Soul singer Curtis
doing a mic check?
40 Water whirled
41 Sticking points
in the forest
42 Toy truck name
43 Spokane-to-Missoula
dir.
44 Silver fodder
45 Period-ending sound
46 Hellmann's visionaries?
50 Attest to be true
53 Announce
54 Quarantine
fatigue feeling
55 Fooling around
with Hizzoner?
59 Band whose name

- is an acronym of its
member's first names
60 Squeeze (out)
61 Turn bad
62 Heat provider?
63 Marry
64 How some measuring
cups are stored
65 Unwanted sights in
some dating apps

Down

- 1 City destroyed in Genesis
2 Film auteur Kurosawa
3 X-Men mutant with
phasing abilities
4 Announces, with
a mush mouth
5 Aunt you might have
over for breakfast
6 Original "No
Trump" speaker
7 Dodger Ron nicknamed
"The Penguin"
8 Tiny tunnel builder
9 Unaccounted-for grunt
10 Throw blanket
11 From the top
12 Urge
13 Award with an
atom in its design
19 Breakdown
sufferer's need
21 Soda originally called
Brad's Drink
24 Big name in bikes
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Frontalot and
MC Hawking
26 Mild cusses
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30 Behavior-changing

- chamber named after an
American psychologist
31 Hog call?
32 Women who often
get out of traps?: Abbr.
33 "Peter Pan" baddie
34 George of the
"MacGyver" reboot
35 Popeye rival
36 Put into Tupperware
38 Site with a watchlist
39 Unemotional
44 Director Aronofsky
45 Peddled fake news, say
46 Chairman's name
47 Grenoble river
48 Putin's scratch
49 Numbers bandied about
on sports talk radio
50 Diving bird
51 Boat's trail
52 Looked up and down
56 Forest feller
57 Record Store Day releases
58 "Don't just stand there!"
59 Best diamond?

Last Week's Answer

W	E	V	E		P	O	K	E	Y		E	B	A	N
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F	O	R	C	E	A	D	R	A	W		L	U	C	
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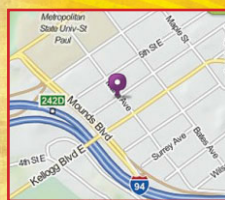


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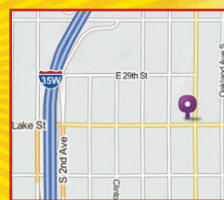
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SAVAGE LOVE

Vexed Exes

Should I unfriend my ex like my girlfriend wants?

I've rekindled a romance with an ex from a decade ago. We're long distance right now but getting very close. We have one recurring problem, though: She doesn't like

that I'm friends with another ex. That ex has actually been a close friend for a very long time and our friendship means a lot to me. Our romantic relationship lasted only a few months. But since we did have a romantic relationship, my current girlfriend sees my ex as a threat.

I've reassured her several times that the relationship is in the past and we're now only friends. But my girlfriend doesn't want me to communicate with her at all. She wants me to unfriend her on Facebook and unfollow her Instagram, and at least once a week she asks if we've been in contact. It's hard for me to throw a friend away in order to be in a relationship. Even though I don't talk to my ex/friend all that regularly, I'd like to have the option to at least check in every once in a while. Cutting her out of my life completely feels like a kind of death. I wish there was some way I could find a compromise, but this seems to be one of those "all or nothing" things. I also don't like this feeling of not being trusted and fear it could lead to other problems down the line.

UNHAPPY GIRLFRIEND HAS SENSITIVITIES

I can see why your current girlfriend might feel threatened by your relationship with an ex, UGHs, seeing as she—your current girlfriend—was until very recently just another one of your exes. Since you got back together with her, the green-eyed monster whispers in her ear, what's to stop you from getting back together with your other ex? What the green-eyed monster doesn't say, of course, is that you had every opportunity to get back together with your ex and didn't. And cutting off your ex now doesn't mean you can't get back together with her later. And what's to stop you from getting together with one of the 3.5 billion women you haven't already dated?

You have to take a hard line on this. Tell your current girlfriend you're happy to provide her with a little reassurance when she's feeling insecure about your

ex but you're not going to unfriend or unfollow her or anyone else. You can make an appeal to reason—you wouldn't be with your current girlfriend if you were the sort of person who cut off contact

with his exes—but if your current girlfriend is the irrationally jealous type... well, an appeal to reason won't help. Irrationally jealous people are by definition incapable of seeing reason, UGHs, which is why they must be shown doors.

This isn't a sexy question, but you are wise and I am confused. I've been friends with a woman for about 16 years. She's very funny,

creative, loves to have a good time. She's also intense, not very bright, and my family and friends don't like having her around. Now that we're grown we don't see each other often, but I've been glad to maintain a friendship with her and get together now and again. Enter: my wedding. At the reception she made a fool of herself (and me) by going on some strange, racist rant. The racist thing really surprised and disappointed me, and when I asked her about it she shrugged it off like, "Oh, just add that to the list of dumb things I do when I'm drunk."

Other things she's done when she's drunk: two DUIs, waking up in jail with an assault charge, having sex with strangers, etc. It's been about seven months since my wedding and I've basically been ignoring her while trying to decide what to do. I love my friend, but I do not want her hurting anyone else on my watch. Do I call her up and end it? See her once a year when no one's around? Ignore her until she dies?

LOYAL TO A FAULT

Tell your racist friend to give you a call after she gets sober and confront her about her racism then—you know, when she's actually capable of remembering the conversation, reflecting on what you had to say, and perhaps changing for the better. If she can't get both sober and better, LTAF, make sure she isn't registered to vote and then ignore her until she dies.

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